



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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RE: Flood Events and Certified Organic Farms

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) Organic Program is accredited to certify organic producers and handlers in accordance with the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Organic Program (NOP) Rule, 7 CFR Part 205.

Every winter, we receive questions about how flood events may impact organic farms' certifications. This factsheet will attempt to answer some of these questions and provide a reference for future concerns surrounding floods and certification.

Does inundation of a farm with flood waters jeopardize an operation's certification?

NO. The NOP regulations require that land used for organic production must not have had prohibited materials applied to it for a period of 3 years immediately preceding the harvest of an organic crop. The NOP also recognizes that there is unavoidable residual environmental contamination (UREC) which could potentially impact the crops grown on an organic site. However, the NOP standards are process based and do not mandate zero tolerance for synthetic pesticide residues in inputs or soils.

Inundation of farmland with floodwaters will not inherently jeopardize the operation's certification. However, the WSDA Organic Program may sample organic crops following a flood event. If these sample results indicate that there are prohibited material residues above FDA action levels or above 5% of the EPA tolerance, the crop must be diverted from the organic marketplace and the operation must develop and implement a plan to prevent future contamination.

How has the WSDA Organic Program responded to previous flood events?

In December of 2007, 17 organic farms located in the Chehalis River basin were inundated with record flood waters and suffered major losses of crops, livestock, infrastructure, and machinery. Immediately following the flood, WSDA organic inspectors visited each of these 17 organic farms. Inspectors walked the fields to note how high water levels rose, where the flood deposited sediment on the farmland, and if there were any signs of petrochemical residues or other contaminants. The inspectors' initial assessments found silt, mud, and woody debris, but no areas of concern from synthetic contaminants.

Later that winter, WSDA inspectors collected plant material growing on the flooded farms. WSDA laboratory staff tested the plants for a wide range of pesticides that would threaten the organic status of the farms' crops. Forty samples were collected and the testing results

indicated that the flood waters did not cause any contamination that threatened the farms' organic status or prevented them from marketing that year's crop as organically grown.

How can I find out more information about the requirements for organic certification and the labeling of products as “organic”?

If you have any questions about organic certification, or the requirements for producing organic products, please contact the WSDA Organic Program staff at:

Phone: 360-902-1805

E-mail: organic@agr.wa.gov

Website: <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Organic/>

Additional Resources:

Washington State Department of Agriculture Food Safety Program

<http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/FSP/>, Phone: (360) 902-1876, E-mail: foodsafety@agr.wa.gov

USDA National Organic Program (USDA NOP)

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop>, Phone: 202-720-3252

The NOP website includes organic regulations, a current list of USDA-NOP accredited certifying agents, consumer information, and guidance on the interpretation of the National Organic Standards.